

NOW AND THEN
DRAMA AND THE CHURCH AS IT IS, AND AS IT MAY BE

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In the discussion of religious drama, it would seem reasonable to begin with a definition of that term. Reasonable it may be; easy it is not. In the first place, there is some disagreement over the definition of drama; and, of course, the agreement about what constitutes "religious" is practically endless. Far more capable men than I have examined this subject at great length, and I feel no compunction to duplicate their efforts. Besides, since I will be using no other interpretation than my own, I can see little benefit in offering a number of alternatives, and then withdrawing them. What, then, is religious drama?

I assume that most people have some conception of drama. I do not intend to muddy the water, but I would like to make a brief comment on the matter. Children play naturally, and when they play, they assume the role of the person they are imitating. This is the groundwork of drama, and so, I submit, there are few if any adults who have not had some acting experience, even if they do not remember it. When adults play, they do not change their identity (indeed, psychiatrists' offices are full of people who cannot find one identity, let alone an endless variety of them). If adults did play that way, instead of simply playing golf, they might go to the country club and play Arnold Palmer, while other members of the foursome played Jack Nicklaus, Sam Snead, and Julius Boros. Or, instead of playing bridge, they might play Oswald Jacoby. But since adults do not play in this fashion, drama is more than the rudimentary, spontaneous role-playing of children. Rather it is the systematic organization of the elements present in childrens' play. As such, it is not merely an illusion. It is a sort of re-presentation of something which did, or will, or might happen. It is analogous to the anamnesis of the Lord's Supper. It is more than illusion, and is not less than reality, but is different from reality in form, while similar in essence.

If drama is a systematic re-creation of reality, what is religious drama? It is drama with a religious theme. The theme does not have to be dominant, but it must be present. For example, Oedipus Rex is usually regarded as one of the greatest examples of tragedy, rather than one of the greatest examples of religious drama. Yet, the pivotal point of the play is the breach of the laws given by the gods - so it is, indeed, a religious drama. It is important that one is aware of the fact that the religious theme may be sublimated. This broadens the scope of religious drama considerably. Of course, religious drama can appropriate a theme from any religion, and is not to be confused with Christian drama, which is something else again. On the other hand, there is a difference between a religious theme, which is inherent in the dramatic work (play, movie, etc.), and a religious interpretation, which can be externally applied to any dramatic undertaking. In all this, reason must be a guiding factor (so that The Three Faces of Eve is not a religious movie drama, any more than a shamrock is a religious plant, although either might be given a religious interpretation).

Christian drama embodies a specifically Christian theme. Because of this, it is much more limited than is religious drama. Any drama with one or more obviously virtuous characters may well be religious but would not be Christian unless a distinct and peculiarly Christian theme was present. It should be remembered that anything with a Biblical theme is religious, but not necessarily Christian; and at the same time, something may be Christian, but not Biblical. For example, the movie The Ten Commandments is certainly religious, certainly Biblical, and definitely not Christian. On the other hand, the movie Crime and Punishment is deeply Christian, but it is clearly not Biblical. So just as religious drama is that which embraces a definitely religious theme, though it may not be dominant, so Christian drama is that which contains a distinctively Christian theme. Christian drama is religious, but religious drama often is not Christian.

Having thus far defined various components of religious drama, the next task to be undertaken is an evaluation of its current status in our churches. As is common knowledge, drama and the Church went their separate ways after a period of close co-operation in the Medieval period. This divorce was punctuated by an attitude of bitter vituperation, especially on the part of the Church. Fortunately, the Church in the Twentieth Century has begun to see the value of drama. Although as recently as the 1920's, certain church leaders (including Episcopalians) gave only dubious assent to Sunday School pageants, and inveighed sternly against the atmosphere of the professional stage, steady progress has been made. At first, religious drama consisted largely of the above-mentioned pageants, complete with dozens of children in bedspreads and dish towel turbans. Gradually, the scope broadened to include missionary topics and dramatized Bible stories, as well as the traditional Christmas and Easter pageants. However, religious drama remained, for a number of years, in the province of youth work and, usually the younger youth at that. It is interesting to note that, for about the first thirty years of this century, it was morally acceptable for children to do something, (i. e., present plays under church auspices), which it was considered improper, almost wicked, for their parents to engage in. In time, the Church realized the folly of this situation, and religious drama for adults was born.

The official christening took place in England in 1928, with the production of John Masefield's commissioned nativity play, The Coming of Christ. Things did not really get under way until the 1930's, with efforts by T. S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers, and other notables. The first religious drama done in this century, including the Sunday School productions, was almost entirely Biblical. Even Masefield's play had a Biblical foundation, as did Eliot's first religious play,

which was about St. Peter. Gradually, things began to open up, the Church came to view drama with greater acceptance, and playwrights and audiences alike began to relax their inhibitions. Christian drama began to find a place and being much less limited in outlook than Biblical themes, a greater variety of religious plays were written and produced. At the moment, this is pretty much how things stand. The preponderance of religious drama being produced today is either Biblical or Christian. And this is also true of the drama being produced in the churches, since very little secular (by which I mean non-religious) drama is being done. Of course, this is not a static situation, and I intend to deal with the future of religious drama shortly. For the moment, I would like to turn briefly to the why and wherefore of drama in our churches today.

There are many reasons why a church might want to engage in drama. It may be used as a unifying factor for the congregation or other group within the parish. It may be to give instruction to the audience on a particular point, or to inspire the viewers to live better lives. It may not have any other purpose than to indulge the interests of those who enjoy working in dramatics, or to entertain an audience. Chances are that any play presented in or by a church will have elements of all these, and that is as it should be. It is foolish to ignore the various elements, because they will be present (except, possibly, inspiration), whether one is aware of them or not, and people will be able to get more out of a play if they are aware of what is going on. Thus, a group that may be doing a play as a unity maneuver should try to be aware of playing to an audience, and a play that is intended to be didactic must also be entertaining, or else it will be neither, but simply boring.

Perhaps another way to look at this would be from the standpoint of the playwright. Why would anybody want to write religious drama? Now, I will not involve myself in trying to probe the mystery

of the creative process. But let me begin by saying that a playwright writes a religious play for the same reason that a painter paints a religious picture. In contemporary Western society, artists are free from the necessity of producing propaganda. Thank God. Art for any sake other than its own has never been consistently good, nor is this situation likely to change. An artist expresses himself because he wants to or has to. Then, he may choose to share this expression with others. He may want to express himself on the subject of politics, or economics, or religion. If a playwright is a religious person, he might at some time express his religious feelings and so he writes a religious play. This is the first step. Next, if those people in a church who are interested in drama are also religious (and most of them probably will be), they might choose to express their religious feelings by presenting a religious play. The creation and production of a play by religious people who use their talents to express their deep and sincere religious feelings, is bound to entertain, inform, inspire, and knit together all those who participate in it and those who view it. The expression of religious feelings is, at least ideally, the "why" of religious drama.

If one understands the why, then the technical aspects of the wherefore become much simpler. When should drama be produced? Anytime. Since one does not have religious feelings only at Christmas and Easter, there is no reason why the dramatic expression of these feelings should be reserved for these seasons. Where? In the best place. Some plays, such as Murder in the Cathedral were written for production in a cathedral, so the interior of a church is admirably suited for their presentation. Other plays are better suited to a proscenium stage, or are of such a nature that a church setting would be distracting. It is not so much a matter of propriety, for, if the sabbath was made for man, not man for the

sabbath, how much more true for church buildings. This is not to say that there is no reason why a strip show should not be produced in a church; after all, the underlying motivation should be that of the expression of sincere religious feelings. Yet when I see the lengths to which some people go to avoid the suggestion of any "improper" thoughts or deeds in a house of God, I am forced to conclude that mankind has not progressed very far from the time when Adam and Eve hid in the bushes at the approach of the Lord. In any case, the interior of a church is quite appropriate for the production of some plays, and inadequate for others. More specific data on the production of religious drama can be found in the many books on that topic. In concluding this aspect, let me mention the matter of discussing a play. This can be very rewarding, and applies to the secular theatre as well as religious drama. Whether large or small discussion groups are used, whether or not the production company is included in the discussion - these and other details must vary in different situations.

Having briefly dealt with what religious drama is and how it is done, I shall now turn to the problem of where it is, or might be, going. From the events of the recent past, it would appear that religious drama is not a static enterprise. In this century, it has progressed from childrens' pageants to the studied performance of serious drama. At present, churches are concentrating almost exclusively on religious drama, both Christian and Biblical. These two areas, and especially that of Christian drama, offer great opportunities for dealing with life as we confront it ourselves. This is of utmost importance if the Church is going to maintain any influence upon society. If the Church has anything at all to offer, and in the Gospel I feel that it has a great deal, it must be able to communicate with the world around it. If it does not, then the "good news" might well be transformed into the "good secret". People today are

seasoned viewers, especially the younger people. Since they are attuned to looking at things, drama has a great potential for the expression of the Gospel in terms easily understood and in a fashion readily accepted. The Church has begun to recognize this fact, and to utilize various communication media to present its message. A few years ago, drama received a great deal of attention in the churches. Some of the initial enthusiasm has since died down, but what is left is stronger and more mature. There are some parishes, notably in New York City, that are seriously committed to the production of good drama. Various workshops are in operation around the country, and many seminaries now offer courses in drama. Since religious drama has lost some of its "pop" characteristics, it has attracted more people who are seriously committed to its purposes. In general, then, the religious drama field seems to be going rather well. The people who are doing it are taking it seriously, and the people for whom it is being done are coming more and more to accept it on its own terms. As a result, it is able to attract more people with real talent, who had previously eschewed the notion of wasting their time and prostituting their skills on religious drama. And as the tastes of audiences of religious drama become ever more discriminating, the quality of the productions is bound to rise. On the whole, then, the prognosis for religious drama would appear to be hopeful.

Thus far, I have tried to offer an interpretation of the field of religious drama. But I am not satisfied to simply state what I think I see, and so I shall turn to what I feel. Much of what I feel has already been said: that religious drama is the systematic re-creation, in a religious context, of something that did, or will, or might happen; and that at least ideally, it is written and produced as an expression of sincere religious feelings. For these reasons, it must be done with as much care and skill as is possible. This

means that, while most religious drama will be done by amateurs, it behooves these people to utilize their talents to the utmost. Before any production is undertaken, the people involved should prepare themselves by study and discussion. There are many books and chapters of books devoted to every phase of play production, many of which are simply written with the amateur in mind. It is to be hoped that the expression of religious feelings will be a spur to proficiency, rather than an inhibiting factor. People producing religious drama should not feel bound by old-fashioned puritanical "niceties", most of which were misguided from the moment of their inception. Rather, like Jesus healing on the sabbath, they should be willing to offend some people in order to act on their sincere convictions. So for those plays which lend themselves to production inside a church, let them be produced there. And for those which would be handicapped by such surroundings, put them on elsewhere. One should be judicious in the use of prayer before a performance. It may put the audience in a pietistic mood. This is suitable to some plays, but quite detrimental to others. On the other hand, it might become an almost meaningless preliminary device, as is the playing of the national anthem before sports events.

If people are to be free from inhibitions in the manner in which they produce drama in a church, this attitude must carry over to the drama which they do. Basically, I have no quarrel with Biblical plays; however, a dramatized Bible story, no matter how skillfully done, remains a dramatized Bible story. True, the majority of church -goers have about a sixth grade religious education level, but the Church cannot hope to correct this situation by catering to it. Christianity is not irrelevant in itself, but becomes so when the Church presents it as an antiquity. When a modern man, with his astounding array of problems, doubts and fears, rejects the Church because it fails to provide the strength and guidance which

he needs, who can blame him? And how can the Church do this unless it comes face to face with all the complexities and frustrations of our society? If the Church lacks the strength and courage to walk tall amidst the ugliness which surrounds it, then surely it will die. But is this not the greatness of the Incarnation? - that Christ Jesus came into this world. We need not respond to the problems that beset us by dropping out, because God has dropped in. The Church, as mediator of this, need not be a place where people go for congratulation for their successes - they do a good job of that themselves. It must be a place where people can openly and honestly present their failures and disappointments, their mistakes and their intentional misdeeds, the softness of their heads and the hardness of their hearts, and receive understanding, forgiveness, comfort, and encouragement. This must be reflected in the drama which the Church produces, unless it is to become simply the "cosy exchange of irrefutable platitudes between the like-minded". (Merchant, Creed and Drama, p. 113).

In order to accomplish this, I would suggest two means. The first of these is through Christian drama which addresses itself to the problems which face men in their daily lives. Forgiveness, redemption, self-giving love are qualities which are not necessarily platitudinous, but which can become facets of a life-style. And while a life-style can be only imperfectly sermonized, it can be poignantly dramatized. When this type of person becomes involved with racial prejudice, or poverty, or is exploited by others, then good Christian drama can result. Some of this type of drama is being done today, and it must be encouraged and expounded.

But all situations do not lend themselves to Christian drama. A steady diet of happy endings, uplifting examples, or nobility in the face of defeat would eventually lose its savour, and probably be boring as well. In this fallen world, bad people often

beat up on other bad people as well as on good people. Much of this is reflected in contemporary secular drama, and this is the second means which I spoke of earlier. The totally secular plays by Genet, Albee, and others, can be examined from a Christian perspective, and, indeed, they should be. Here is one place where discussion is particularly appropriate. I think that a church presentation of, say, Albee's An American Dream, and a discussion following it, might be a unique and valuable experience. Hopefully, the effort of responding from a Christian standpoint would involve a good deal of hard thinking. Even if it resulted only in frustration, this alone would point out most graphically the need for further theological education. By using secular drama, the Church can deal with the world on its own terms.

If all this sounds somewhat unlike the usual conception of "religious drama", that is quite alright. Yet the basic elements are still present. Christian drama, and, if anything, even more so, secular drama is the re-creation of what did, or will, or might happen. And it is still the expression of sincere religious feelings - Christian drama by its very nature, and secular drama by the faith evident in the willingness to produce it and reflect on it. With this faith, and with courage, as well as with the necessary skill, the Church can use drama to communicate the Good News which the world so desperately needs to hear.

INTRODUCTION TO OUTCAST

Outcast exemplifies contemporary Christian drama. It deals with some of the problems which face people in their daily lives. While relatively few people are ever involved with such traumatic situations as murder; pre-marital sex, teenage drinking, civil disobedience, rebellion, and alienation from and by society are all matters which confront us daily. It is for precisely this reason that they should be dealt with in our churches. Being relevant is speaking to specific issues, rather than making generalizations about "sin" and "immorality" and so forth. This alone is more than many churches are doing now, and thus it represents a significant achievement. The Church, simply by expressing a real interest in the affairs of its people, and a commitment to be of assistance to them, can inspire the interest and confidence of many of those who had previously considered it a waste of time. Outcast, then, comes to grips with some of the real problems that real people have.

This characteristic of contemporary Christian drama includes dealing with the material in an honest fashion, while avoiding the shocking or flashy embellishments found when a church tries too hard to be "with it". The nastiness of hypocrisy and alienation, the pain and shame of sexual promiscuity and rejection are not sugar-coated, but are portrayed as part of the human condition. There are no "good" people in Outcast; each person manages to act selfishly at the expense of others, and to react with indignation and hypocrisy. Some of the people are repentant, and some are not. To those who are, the Christ (or could it be the Church?) is there to offer consolation and forgiveness. Indeed, in the case of the Peace Lover, a

little convincing is necessary, as a lost sheep is not simply welcomed back into the fold, but is actively sought out. The realism of Outcast is not restricted to the problems encountered, but extends to the conclusion. There is no happy ending, and the Christ does not leave the situation one of sweetness and light. The self-righteous, the hard-of-heart, the unforgiving will be there "same as ever". Although the power of Sin has been broken, its existence has not been eliminated, and it would be cruelly deceptive to try to pretend otherwise. Outcast, as contemporary, Christian drama, attempts to deal openly and forthrightly with some of the problems that confront people in their daily lives; to present a sound theology and a realistic evaluation of life; and to judge the propriety of actions not by some rigid moral code, but by the effect which they have upon others.

The other element which distinguishes Outcast as contemporary is its style. While the subject matter is treated as realistically as possible, the method of treatment is definitely stylistic. Each member of "the Foursome" is a caricature, yet each retains enough contact with reality to be believable, if unattractive. They are typological characters as, indeed, is the Christ. This latter person is not to be confused with Jesus of Nazareth, nor is he to be understood as a "Christ-figure", as one would conceive of a "God-figure" or a "father-figure". His presence, along with the caricatured types and the manner in which the characters move, is in keeping with the style of much contemporary secular drama. Albee, Beckett, and Ionesco are but three of the many playwrights who have freed several of their works from the limitations of space and time. This particular style, when done awkwardly, can be both distracting and pointless. Hopefully this is not the case in Outcast.

I mentioned earlier that many churches are not at present willing to deal openly with the problems of contemporary society. To such churches, Outcast will perhaps appear to be distasteful

or improper. It is quite possible that some people will be insulted or embarrassed by the Minister or some other member of the Foursome, or will regard the sexual assignation of the teenage girl as improper to be mentioned in church. But such people as the Minister do exist, and many teenagers do lack adequate guidance in sexual matters, and the Church has a high obligation to minister to its people in their needs. Christ Jesus did not come into this world to ignore sinners, or even to condemn them, but to save them. It is imperative that the Church bear witness to this fact. Outcast may be difficult for some parishes to accept, but, as far as Christian drama is concerned, it represents almost the bare minimum of what must be done. There are events in life far more sordid and people in greater need of redemption, than anybody or anything that appears in Outcast. Compared with trying to relate Christianity to such situations, Outcast is hardly more than a warm-up exercise.

However, this is about all that should be expected from religious drama. It is not supposed to supply solutions to problems, but to be the expression of sincere religious feelings. It is the task of contemporary Christian drama to express these feelings honestly and comprehensively, and to give them depth by the use of example or illustration from the events and problems of daily life. Outcast is but one example of such Christian drama.

OUTCAST

CAST

The Mother
The Minister
The Teenager
The Civic Official
The Girl
The Peace Lover
The Christ

Enter, singly, in order: Mother, Minister, Teenager, Civic Official.

Mother I am a representative of American Parenthood, and a supporter of Mothers for Moralism. I deplore the actions of the younger people, the way they are so disrespectful of their elders, or any authority, for that matter. Why, when I was their age I never would have thought of talking back to my parents or teacher, after all, they do know what's best. These teenagers, the boys with the long hair, and the girls with the short indecent skirts, really, I just don't see how their parents let them get away with it all. None of my children would behave in that fashion. After all, I am a mother, and I do love children, and my youngsters are nice, decent, respectful young people.

Minister I am a man of the cloth. I am a modern shepherd. Jesus loves me, this I know. I don't understand what this world is coming to. In my day, everybody had a healthy respect for mankind, and womankind, for that matter. Decent, self-respecting Christians, that's what we need more of. Take the new morality, why everybody knows that it's just the old immorality. And whatever happened to the humble poor? the kind we used to remember in our offerings? They aren't humble any more, and they don't even want to be poor. If people spent more time in those poverty programs teaching those people in the slums the rewards of an honest day's work, and less time on handing out free food, we'd be in better shape around here. And they should spend less time at the dirty movies, and more time at church. Some

people want the church to get involved in politics. I believe in the separation of church and state. And all those sermons about civil rights and foreign policy and so forth... where are the sermons about faith, and love, and the holy ghost? Terrible, terrible.

Teenager I am a typical representative of the American teenager. I think that juvenile delinquency is just terrible, and I don't have anything to do with that kind of person. I love my mother, and my father, too, even though they don't understand me; and I love my country, and God, and Mankind. Sure, I know kids who go drink and then race their parents' cars around, or go parking, and go too far, and cheat on tests, and wise off with the teachers, but I wouldn't include myself in that group. You know the bunch with the long hair and the dirty feet? The ones who go on marches and love-ins? Well, I guess some of them might have something to contribute, but basically they are just immature oddballs. I mean, I consider myself to be pretty straight and liberal, but let's face it, there are just some types that don't fit in, and are a drag on the rest of us, and I don't want them in my group.

Civic Official I am a representative of the people, elected to civil government to insure that our society runs smoothly and within the limits of the law. This is a very difficult period to live in, but I know that strong, moral government is the answer. However, people do make things hard for us. Now they say that we have to tell accused criminals what their rights are. Absurd. Look at all this civil disobedience, that's what happens when you let up. And look at all the filth that's around, now that they've gone so liberal on censorship. Fanny Hill

in every bookstore, Playboy at the newsstand where any child can see it. Revolting. Did you know that they might start giving birth control information to unmarried people? No wonder this country is going down hill. How about all those sit-ins? Shocking. Lax morals and censorship; mass law-breaking; no more respect for authorities; public denunciation of the government policy...is it any wonder that the Russians are catching up?

Enter girl.

Mother Come here, young lady. Who are you?

Girl Mary Williams.

Civic Official Where were you on Saturday night?

Girl On a date. We went to a movie.

Minister Then where did you go?

Girl Home, to my house.

Teenager Stopping off along the way for a good hour's worth of parking.

Girl Now, wait a minute, what is this?

Minister It is true, isn't it?

Girl So what's wrong with a little making out? Anyway, we spent most of the time just talking.

Mother I can't believe that Ron Palermo spent much time talking. That just isn't part of his reputation.

Teenager What did he bring to drink?

Girl Coke. And this is none of your business.

Minister Young lady, this most certainly is our business. After all, the church has always been the instructor of morals. Physical intimacy is a serious matter. We must know where sin is, so we can protect the innocent, God-fearing Christians.

Civic Official And there is the matter of the Law. There are all kinds of laws against loitering, and indecent behavior, and so forth. We must protect society from lawbreakers, you know. Was there rum in that coke?

Girl Well, maybe... I'm not sure.

Mother You see, I suspected it all along. In the hands of a teenager, a car is just a bedroom on wheels. The drinking simply adds to the atmosphere. No wonder the Kinsey Report was so shocking. Just what did you do?

Girl Wait, please ...

Civic Official That boy is said to have quite a persuasive way with girls. I know his type. How persuasive can he be? Well?...

Girl Yes, yes, that's right. He moved so fast I just didn't know what was happening. You're right. Now, isn't that enough? Please ...

Teenager Was that enough for him?

Girl Stop it! Please, stop... no more...

Minister Well, did you give yourself to him?

Girl Give myself? No, really. All of a sudden I realized what was going on. I told him to stop... really, I did... I told him I just couldn't...

Mother Never mind, you've told us quite enough already.

Girl But you've got to believe me. I told him to stop.

Teenager Yeah, sure... it's an old story. That's what they all say.

Girl He just wouldn't listen to me. He wouldn't take no for an answer.

Civic Official Why don't you listen to your parents? Why can't you obey the Law?

Girl I didn't want to... I tried... really... please believe me... He just wouldn't stop... Oh, please, please...

Mother We don't want to listen to any of your filthy details.

Girl No more, please,... I'm sorry... I didn't mean to...

Minister Adultery. You have committed adultery. Being sorry won't change that. Your very presence profanes the house of God.

Girl No... please... I'm so sorry...

Teenager Don't look at me, baby. You may be his type, but I don't want anything to do with you. Not anymore. You've had it.

Girl No... Please don't...

Mother Don't you come near me, you little tramp. You're a bad influence on my nice children, and disgusting to me. An insult to decent families.

Girl I'm so sorry, so sorry...

Civic Official You have committed more crimes than I care to think about. You are an evil temptation to all the good, law-abiding citizens. You will probably end up being

a burden on the taxpayers. You are an unwanted weight around the innocent neck of society.

Girl No... No...

All Four,
in Order CONDEMN.

All Four,
in Unison OUTCAST. CONDEMN.

Present Girl with burden, which she accepts silently. She exits.
Enter Peace Lover.

Civic Official Hey, you, beatnik... Yes, you. Come over here.
What's your name?

Peace Lover Stein. Barry Stein.

Teenager I bet you went down to New York for that big peace demonstration.

Peace Lover Yeah, that's right. You too?

Minister Do we really look like the type to engage in civil disobedience?

Peace Lover Well, now that you mention it, I guess not.

Mother Some of our boys are over there. We certainly wouldn't break their hearts by that kind of behavior. And you know what we think of those who do?

Peace Lover I'm beginning to get the picture.

Civic Official What's the matter with you anyway? Why do you have to go around so dirty and sloppy? Why do you insult us good citizens? Why do you have to disrupt everything? Why can't you obey the Law?

Peace Lover Why don't you stop bombing the women and children?
Why roast up the innocent with napalm?

Teenager Look, Banana Smoker, we don't have anything to do with napalm, and besides, nobody bombs civilians on purpose.

Peace Lover Come off it, man. Dow is making so much money with napalm, they don't care who it gets dropped on. Even so, we got no right to be there anyway.

Mother What's wrong with freedom? We're protecting their freedom. And how about communism? We must stop communism before it spreads. They want to bury us, you know.

Peace Lover Oh, for Christ's sake, lady.

Minister Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

Peace Lover Hey, what's with you, man? I mean, you're on the God squad, aren't you. I thought you guys dug peace, like "Beat your swords into plowshares."

Teenager You just twist words because you're too chicken to stand up for your country. Where's your patriotic pride?

Peace Lover It may be the stars and stripes for the white bourgeois conservatives, but not for me, baby.

Mother How terrible! I think you have no manners, and no backbone, and no pride, and you're probably a communist stooge, and you need a bath. What do you think of that?

Peace Lover (Sneeringly) Make love, not war.

Civic Official I just don't know how much of this insulting behavior I can take. Say, young man, what do you do for a living?

Peace Lover Sometimes I wash dishes; sometimes I'm a janitor. Actually, I'm a poet.

Minister I can't see why you're not in the army. They probably wouldn't want you. What is your draft status?

Peace Lover I dunno.

Teenager It's on your draft card, stupid.

Peace Lover Right. But I burnt it.

All Four What?! ?! ?!

Peace Lover I burnt it to protest the obscene war in Viet Nam. To protest the barbaric practice of killing civilians, and interfering with the natural self-realization of the non-whites of Asia in their rise from under the exploitive heel of decadent Western colonialism.

Minister Because you have no love for man or for God; no appreciation of liberty and justice; no gratitude for your many blessings.

Peace Lover Because black privates are dying while white diplomats wait for an honorable settlement.

Mother Because you don't love your parents, or your patriotic countrymen who are protecting you, or the American virtues.

Peace Lover Because money is taken away from the poverty programs to buy bombs to drop on women and children.

Civic Official Because you have no respect for the Law, or authority, and no determination or self-reliance.

Peace Lover Because you members of a bloated, uncultured society have sold out to the industrialist warmongers.

Teenager Because you're a dirty oddball who is too yellow to fight. A big chicken.

Peace Lover I wouldn't fight for you or any part of your greedy, mindless society. I don't want anything to do with it.

Teenager I'd rather go off and get shot than grow up like you.
Yellow.

Peace Lover But man, I'm for peace, and artistic sensitivity.

Minister You certainly aren't sensitive to any of our values.
There is no room for you if you don't humble yourself before God.

Peace Lover Hey, baby, God may be dead, but I still love. What about my love?

Mother You don't love God, or liberty, or the American way, or morality, or any of the right things. You're just a dirty, yellow, misfit.

Peace Lover Wait a minute. You can't just write me off like that. I'm the voice of protest; the other side of the coin; a valuable contributor to society.

Civic Official Not our society. You're too yellow. What's more you insult us, assail our values, break our laws, and ignore your responsibilities. We don't want any part of you. Not even in our jails.

Peace Lover But I want to protest from within society, not from without. I don't like a lot of things, but I don't want to be cut off. I...I...

All Four,
in Order CONDEMN.

All Four,
in Unison OUTCAST. CONDEMN.

Hand him burden, etc. Then, the FOURSOME shake hands and exit; singly in order. Enter CHRIST. Then the GIRL and PEACE LOVER re-enter silently with burdens.

Christ Hello. Those look heavy. Let me take them for you.

Girl Thank you. Thank you very much.

Peace Lover Yeah, thanks. I feel better already.

Christ Good, that's fine.

Girl You don't seem like one of them...

Christ No...

Girl But you're not really one of us.

Christ Not exactly...

Girl Oh. (Pause) You know, they really are awful.

Peace Lover Yeah, what a bunch of hypocrites. I mean, they had no right to do that to me. I'm a member of society, too. Somebody has to protest. --- Man, they really know how to hurt a guy.

Girl I'll say. It still hurts just to think about it.

Christ Perhaps you hurt them too...

Peace Lover Man, I don't think they have any feelings. And I don't think they had any right to treat us like that.

Girl That's right. After all, I said I was sorry.

Christ Why were you sorry?

Girl Because they made me feel so awful, it was terrible. And so public - I didn't ever want to say anything to anybody about it, especially like that... And, well, I guess I maybe... gave in too easily. I mean, really, I didn't want to, and I'm not really that way. I want to get married some day, and have a nice husband and a nice family. I'm not that kind of girl... I made a mistake... I did something I shouldn't have, and I'm sorry.

Christ I know. You can forget it now; it doesn't matter anymore. And as for the future...

Girl Don't worry. I won't even give it a chance to happen again.

Peace Lover How about the way they treated me? What did I do to them?

Christ Well, how about it?

Peace Lover I protested. I disagree with a lot of their ideas, and I don't like a lot of their methods. And I told them so.

Christ I'll say you did.

Peace Lover But they kicked me out.

Christ Rejection hurts, doesn't it?

Peace Lover Yes, it really does.

Christ Didn't you say that you didn't want anything to do with them?

Peace Lover Well, I guess I did.

Christ And that Draft Card?

Peace Lover A symbol of protest. What's wrong with that?

Christ With protest? Nothing. Was it legal?

Peace Lover No, but so what? Sometimes that's necessary - there is a higher law, you know.

Christ I know.

Peace Lover So they were wrong to kick me out.

Christ You seem awfully quick to condemn.

Peace Lover (Guardedly) And...

Christ So were they.

Peace Lover Now wait a minute; are you suggesting that I was like them?

Christ Are you?

Peace Lover (Thoughtfully) As a matter of fact, I'm beginning to wonder... quick to condemn... I guess not too anxious to see their point of view... I think I'm beginning to see what you're driving at.

Christ What do you see?

Peace Lover Well, what I already said... and I guess I did say I didn't want anything to do with them, so that's really sort of rejection itself, isn't it?... yeah,... that's right... and the draft card bit... I still say I was justified in that...

Christ You were justified in trying to live by your higher law.

Peace Lover Right... Say, OK... that's a point... I was justified in trying to act according to the law as I saw it, but then I can't really knock them for trying to act according to the law as they saw it. So, when I look at it this way, I can see that maybe we did have some things in common... and all of them bad. Do you really think I had it coming?

Christ No, they were wrong there; and they were hypocritical and self-righteous.

Girl The fact that they were wrong doesn't make us any less guilty, does it?

Christ Not really. (Long Pause) You know, we're going to have to move on soon. We can't stay around here forever.

Girl But where will we go?

Christ Back.

Peace Lover But we can't do that. We're outcasts.

Christ Not exactly. You can be rejected, but you can't be wiped out. You can run, but you can't get away.

Girl We want to stay with you. We like you... we need you. And what about them?

Christ They'll be there, same as ever.

Peace Lover But what should we do with them?

Christ Well, you said a moment ago that you liked and needed me. Why?

Girl Because you were nice to us, and made us feel better, and helped us.

Peace Lover You accepted us as we are, and didn't hold anything against us.

Christ All right, be that way to each other, and to them... Come on now, it's about that time.

Girl We'll miss you very much.

Christ Don't worry; I'll keep in touch.

Girl and
Peace Lover Thank you... Good bye... Thank you.

INTRODUCTION TO BIRTHDAY

Like Outcast, Birthday deals with reality. The setting might be most any upper-middle-class home, and the occasion is reminiscent of a fairly typical cocktail party. As far as construction is concerned, Birthday is far more realistic than Outcast, in that the action does not transcend either time or space, and the characters are more-or-less individuals, with no caricatures. Birthday does depart from reality, but this is done in a much more subtle fashion than in Outcast. In a way, Birthday portrays a microcosm, so that what takes place, realistic as it may ordinarily be, is compressed in such a fashion that it seems somehow unreal. This is particularly true of the ending, which, although it results from a sequence of events, appears surprisingly intense, or even unnecessary.

For this reason, it has some kinship with the so-called "Theatre of the Absurd." This type of drama deals with situations, usually unpleasant, which seem to be divorced from any scheme of things or cause-and-effect relationship. That is to say, in traditional drama, and poetry and literature, for that matter, certain motifs are present. In one of these, virtue is rewarded, as in the Old Testament story of Lot. Another motif is the punishment of injustice, which was, indeed, the theme of most of the prophets. Another, somewhat more sophisticated motif concerned the temporary triumph of injustice over goodness, as can be seen in the "suffering servant" of Isaiah, the life of Jesus, and the witness of the martyrs. In each of these motifs, whether the goodness or evil succeeds or fails, it does so precisely because it is good or evil, and thus a cause-effect relationship is always present. But in the "absurd", the success or failure occurs without any reference

whatsoever to the moral nature of the individual or the situation in which he is involved. This sort of thing might, for example, result from the brake-failure on a subway train. When such an event occurs, everybody on the train is affected. Among the passengers might be a pickpocket looking for a score, a businessman on his way to present a check for \$5,000. to some charity, and assorted more or less average individuals. Yet in this situation, they are indiscriminately struck down, without regard to who or what they are, simply because they happened to catch a particular subway train. This is the type of subject matter dealt with by the theatre of the absurd, and reflected to a certain extent in Birthday.

It is obviously not Christian drama, and yet it is very important that the Church become involved with it. Similar events happen all the time, and the people touched by them suffer accordingly. The Church must not decline to deal with amoral suffering. In Birthday, Ralph is neither a very good nor a very bad man. He has some tragic weaknesses, but they are certainly not immoral or malign. Actually, he relates to others in a rather generous fashion. But neither his goodness nor lack thereof have any bearing on what happens to him. I will not discuss the action of the play any further, because it is my hope that this will be done following its performance (or public reading). Since it is not inherently Christian, it is up to individuals to decide how the Gospel can relate to it. Since it can be interpreted on a number of levels, the scope of its religious significance can be fairly broad. If a person feels that he can in any wise identify with any of the characters, so much the better. In the discussion, it must be kept in mind that, to a Christian, the significance of Birthday, like that of a hurricane or a daffodil, does not lie in the object itself, but in how one looks at it.

Where, in this type of play, does the "expression of sincere religious feelings" enter the picture? It is seen in the final stage, in

the willingness to produce and discuss it, to put one's faith to the test of hard, unpleasant reality. If the result of such a venture is that some people are made aware of the fact that their faith is adequate only for what happens one hour a week in church, then this will probably be brought home with more force than any sermon could ever muster. Hopefully, the benefit will be greater than this.

Birthday, then, is representative of a type of drama which the Church can utilize in the future. In itself, and in the discussion of it, the faith of individual Christians can be tested and refined, and the Church, as well as its members, will be the stronger for it.

BIRTHDAY

CAST

Ralph
Harry
George
Alice
Roger

Ralph is sitting, reading, smoking his pipe. There is a knock at the door and Ralph gets up to open it. Enter Harry.

Ralph Why, hello, Harry; come in. It's nice to see you.

Harry Guess I'm pretty lucky to find you in, Ralphie. Thought you might be out on the town tonight.

Ralph Why?

Harry Now, you can't kid me Ralphie, I know it's your birthday

Ralph So it is; how thoughtful of you to remember. You know, it can get kind of lonely around here on such occasions, and it's nice to know that someone's thinking of you. Have a seat, Harry.

Harry Say, don't mind if I do. It's easier to sit on your duff than to stand on formality, eh? (Sits down) T. V. work?

Ralph No, it's been broken now for a couple of months. I was just listening to the Hi-Fi - Beethoven's 3rd.

Harry Well, that long-hair stuff isn't for me, I wouldn't know Beethoven from Berlitz. (Pause). I thought you might be watching the tube. The Trailblazer's on tonight, and I never miss it if I can help it.

Ralph Well, there are a few things I enjoy on television, but I just haven't gotten around to calling the repairman. As long as I have some pleasant music and a good book, I'm pretty content. (Marks place in book, and lays it aside).

Harry What book is that?

Ralph Crime and Punishment.

Harry Crime and Punishment, huh? I think I read that in high school.

Ralph Yes, that's where I first ran into it. I enjoy Dostoevsky in general, and Crime and Punishment in particular, so I always read it every four or five years. This is the fourth time I've read it, and I think I've really gotten more out of it each time.

Harry Really, Ralph, I thought you'd be more up with it than that.

Ralph Than what?

Harry You know what Marshall McClusky says.

Ralph McLuhan?

Harry Right, right. He says the medium is the message, man; books are no good.

Ralph That is something of an oversimplification. (Pause).

Harry You've read that same book three times already? Well, I guess that's not too bad. Myself, I've seen Pork Chop Hill three times in the movies and once on T. V.

Ralph You're kidding.

Harry No, I mean it. Great flick...great flick. (Pause - Knock on door). Hey, there's somebody else.

Ralph Yes, I wonder who it could be. (Goes to Door and opens it. Enter George and Alice).

George Ralph!

Ralph Well, hello, it's George and Alice, what a pleasant surprise. Won't you come in?

George Yes, thanks. Hello, there, Harry.

Harry George, how're you doing? Where's that cute little lady of yours? Oh, there she is. You're looking great, Alice, as ever.

Alice Harry, you really know how to charm a girl.

Harry Just to you, Alice, just to you.

George Say, now, what do you two have going?

Alice Oh, George, don't be an old fink. After all, I did know Harry before I met you.

George Do I really look like the jealous type?

Alice Sure thing, tiger, your quick temper just scares the pants off me.

Harry If only I had known! (All laugh)

Alice By the way, Ralph, happy birthday. After all, that's why we're here.

George Yeah, happy birthday.

Ralph Thank you very much. It is most considerate of you to remember. Can I take your coat?

Alice No thanks, I think I'll keep it with me. It's a little chilly in here.

Ralph I'm sorry. Personally, I find a warm room sort of . . . enervating.

Alice I know what you mean. It can get on my nerves, too.

George If you think a warm room is enervating, you ought to try a wife sometime. Man, she can enervate you right out the door and into the nearest bar.

Harry Mind if I try yours? (All laugh)

Alice Next time he's at the bar, I'll give you a call, and you can come over and get enervated. (All laugh).

Ralph Would you like me to turn up the heat?

Alice No, I've got my coat, and it shouldn't be too bad for a short time.

Ralph Well, shall we be seated? (Doorbell rings). Oh, my, there's the doorbell again. (Goes to the door and opens it. Enter Roger). Roger - what a pleasant surprise. Come in, come in.

Roger Don't mind if I do. Sorry I had to come alone, but we couldn't get a babysitter. I was going to pick up Vinnie on the way, but he, uh, has a sales trip tomorrow, and wanted to, uh, stay home with his wife. So anyway, here I am.

Ralph Well, it is so nice of you to come, especially when you had to leave your family to do it.

Roger Yeah, well, that's o.k. for a little while. By the way, happy birthday - I almost forgot.

Ralph Thank you. Do you know everyone here?

Roger Let's see... George and Alice, and Harry, sure - old friends.

Harry By the way, Rodge, I hope you brought a halloween mask.

Roger Gee, Harry, if I had known you were wearing yours, I would have. (All laugh).

Harry Yeah, well if you knew what Alice does when she gets scared, you would have brought one.

Roger What's that?

Harry Her pants come off. (Snickers).

George And she enervates. (Snickers).

Ralph Well, have a seat.

Roger Thanks. (Sits. A somewhat long pause ensues).

George By the way, Roger, are you still with Sherlock and Webb?

Roger Yes. They're really a fine house, and the people are really top caliber. Of course, all brokerage houses have fairly similar training programs, and experienced members. There are certain basic elements in the system that really anybody can learn if he has the time and the right instruction. For example, there are some elementary principles of market analysis that everybody uses. Sherlock and Webb, however, supplements this with careful and expert research.

George Doesn't everybody?

Roger Again, certain pieces of data are elemental for market analysis, and everybody knows it. Most of this can be evaluated relatively easily by anyone who knows the ground-rules, or, even better, by a computer. As a matter of fact, we have been utilizing computers a good bit recently to do our basic evaluations. This eliminates the chance of human error or bias, saves time, and, most important, saves our people a lot of drudgery. But as for our research, we are helped a lot by our many contacts in business and industry. Knowing the management personnel of a company can be very important. For example knowing that the chairman of the board of the

X Company is merger-mad, and will merge with almost anybody, can be much more revealing than the net profits for the last ten years. Of course, we can't know everything or everybody, but we feel that, with our sound analysis, modern methods, and comprehensive research, we can offer our customers a really knowledgeable evaluation of the general market situation and of particular companies.

Harry By the way, Roger, perhaps there's something you can help me with.

Roger What's that, Harry?

Harry You see, I get this tip on a stock that has real promise, and I could use some advice. It's called Panhandle Mining - out west someplace.

Roger (Thoughtfully) Panhandle Mining...

Harry Right. Now, maybe you haven't heard of it, because it's still small. That's really the whole point, see. If I can pick it up cheap now, when they make a name for themselves I'll be sitting on easy street. Good idea, no?

Roger That's hard to say, Harry; you haven't really said too much about the company. Of course, the design is alright, but if things happened that way with any frequency we'd all be rich.

Harry Sure. So this Panhandle Mining is in the silver mining business. They're out west someplace, and really have this great lead on some silver-producing land, or whatever you call it. The guy who gave me the tip couldn't say too much about the precise location at the moment, since the situation is not affirmed as of yet.

Roger Harry, don't you remember what happened when we went off the silver standard, and stopped using silver coins? The price of silver just doesn't make this sound very promising.

Harry Let me finish. For one thing, the story behind the company is really something else. This fellah was driving along the highway out west on his vacation, and down the road there was this old Indian with his donkey. All of a sudden a car came real fast down the road, and the donkey like panicked, and knocked the old man out into the road, and the other car hit him and kept right on going. Now, this guy I'm telling you about is a doctor, see. So he stops and takes care of the old Indian, and really saves his life. And then he drives him into the hospital. So then he leaves, and doesn't think any more about it. O.K. So, a couple of years later he's in the same area on another vacation, and he stops at this little store for some cigarettes, and who do you suppose is in that store?

Alice The Indian?

Harry Right! So the Indian recognizes him, and really wants to thank him for saving his life and says he wants to give him something that he has at home. It seems like he made this beautiful silver belt buckle just in case he ever met this doctor again. So on the way to his house they're talking, and the doctor says that the silver must be expensive to buy, and the Indian says not so, he doesn't buy his silver, so the doctor says it must be pretty hard work prospecting and mining silver being an old man like that, especially since his accident, but the old Indian says

its no work just to walk out and pick it up. Now when he hears this, the doctor gets very interested, since his brother happens to be a geologist. Funny thing, though, he says, that the Indians don't make a lot of money with all that right there on their Reservation. No, the Indian says, the Reservation is fifty miles away. So this really turns on the doctor's interest, and he starts talking about selling the land. Well, the Indian isn't sure, but he'll think about it. So in the meantime, the doctor calls his brother, who comes down in a few days. Anyway, to make a long story short, the brother thinks the land has great potential, and the Indian agrees to sell, so that's how Panhandle Mining got started. Pretty fantastic, huh?

George That's no lie.

Roger What is the present state of their operations ?

Harry That's what I just told you. That was only a few months ago. The brother still knows the situation is great, but it takes time to get going, you know. That's why I want to get in right now. After everything gets going big, and the word gets out, the price of the stock is going to zoom way up.

Roger So, as I understand it, Panhandle Mining consists of two brothers with a silver belt buckle and some land out west.

Harry Yeah, right now. But maybe even as soon as next week they'll be producing silver, in high grade ore in large amounts.

George Did you ever consider investing in a company that makes belt buckles? (Some tittering).

Harry Very funny. But believe me, I don't mind your laughing - I could care less. I'll get my laughs soon enough - on the way to the bank.

Roger To be honest, Harry, I wouldn't put all my hopes on it. Even if everything is as you heard it, and it does sound a little far out, you still have to keep in mind the price of silver, and the general market reaction to silver issues.

Harry Right, I am, I am. That's where the second half comes in. There are a lot of companies and laboratories doing research to find more uses for silver, right? You must know about that. So when they find these uses, the price of silver goes up, and so does the stock in silver mining companies, namely Panhandle Mining. So you see, the price is influenced in an upward direction from not one but two different pressures. What do you say about that?

Roger Right now I can't say much more than I've already said, and that's not too positive.

Harry Like the doctors and the lawyers, eh Rodge? No free advice, even for a friend with a good tip and a lot of imagination.

Roger Now look, Harry, we make our money from commissions on transactions, not from giving advice. I have no information and no resources in this place, so I simply can't be of much help. If you're interested, why don't you come on down to the office sometime? I'll be glad to do anything I can for you.

Harry All right, I just might do that (Pause, Brief)

George Speaking of free advice, I happen to be very lucky that some doctors don't mind giving free advice sometimes.

Roger How's that?

George Well, a few years ago just such advice saved my life.

Alice Oh, George, don't be so melodramatic. Besides, why do you think anyone wants to hear about your operation anyway?

George Look Alice, just because you were so busy talking that you didn't notice anything was wrong doesn't mean that it wasn't serious. As a matter of fact, the surgeon told me later that it was caught just in time before some serious complications developed.

Alice That's hardly saving your life.

Harry So anyway, what happened?

George We were at this cocktail party, see, and all of a sudden I got something like a cramp. I was standing there minding my own business when POW! I mean, I just about doubled up. Talk about a shock!

Roger So you asked in a loud voice, "Is there a doctor in the house?" . . . Right?

George Not exactly, but you're really not too far off. Actually, at first I thought it might have been something I ate kicking up in my stomach. They had some very rich and spicy h'ors d'ouerves.

Alice Something you ate? Now there's a good one. This story gets richer every time you tell it.

George (With a very caustic glance at his wife). So anyway, the pain only lasted a few seconds, but after it went away, I still had this funny kind of feeling, sort of a creepy feeling, and an ache as well. About fifteen or twenty minutes later I had another attack. The pain

wasn't quite as sharp as the first time, but the ache stayed on a lot worse. So I figured no more goodies for me, and next time it happens, I go home. So a few minutes later I got another drink, and I couldn't have been half way finished with it when POW! This time it hit me so hard I really doubled right over, spilled my drink, went down on one knee... man, it was really something else.

Alice I'll say it was. I was never so embarrassed in my life. As a matter of fact I did notice him... I thought he was drunk. So did a lot of other people; and nobody, I might add, seemed very surprised.

George Would you like to tell everybody why you couldn't drive me to the hospital? I'll give you a hint, Harry; it wasn't because she lost her keys. (He and Alice exchange hostile glances). So anyway, the host came over and was very considerate. I told him I had a couple of these attacks for maybe an hour, and he said there was a doctor present. So the doctor gave me a quick going over in one of the bedrooms, and suggested that I should go to the hospital immediately, since it appeared to be an inflamed appendix. Fortunately, a friend of mine was in a decent condition to drive, so he took me over, and a couple of hours later my appendix was out, just like that. I don't know how Alice got home, and I'm not sure she does either.

Alice As a matter of fact, Old Georgie did leave out one detail. The doctor told us later that if he hadn't been so juiced he would have noticed the discomfort a lot earlier, and saved everybody a lot of trouble and embarrassment.

George If you think my little wife Malice is sweet now, you ought to see her at home, when she's not making a big effort to be polite.

Harry Really enervating, eh George? (All laugh. Relax some).

George Yeah, and she scares my pants off. (Some laughs).

Harry About that date Alice. Next time George is down at the bar, give me a call, and we'll get together for a little enervation. (Some laughter, but George is not so sure it's all that funny. Pause).

Ralph (After the somewhat lengthy, perhaps embarrassing pause). Well, speaking of drinking, can I get anybody something?

Harry Hey, sounds great to me, Ralphie. You name it, I'll drink it.

Roger What're you serving, Ralph?

Ralph Actually, I guess I have most everything. However, I thought that perhaps someone might like to join me in something special. I have a bottle of thirty year old Spanish Brandy, and it is really quite a treat.

Roger As long as it's not grease, it's o.k. with me.

George Me too, sounds fine. I didn't even know they made brandy in Spain, just France and California. Is it any good?

Ralph I think you'll like it. Give it a try.

George Sure, sure, I intend to.

Ralph Fine. Alice?

Alice I'm not sure. Do you have any Creme de Cacao? (Pronounces it: Cream de Cocoa).

Ralph I'm terribly sorry, but I don't.

Alice Let me think a minute.

Harry In the meantime, I'll have mine in a tall glass with plenty of ice and soda. Just call me Winston Churchill! Why don't you have the same, Alice? That way, you can hardly taste the brandy.

Alice Do I really look like Winston Churchill?

Harry Gee, I don't know. Somebody give her a cigar, and we'll take a look at her profile. (Some laughter).

Alice Well, I don't really like soda either. Do you have any ginger?

Ralph Ginger ale? Yes, I have some. Is that what you'd like - some ginger ale?

Alice Right. Make mine with ginger.

Ralph You mean you want brandy and ginger ale?

Alice Now you've got it. That should be o. k.

Ralph Uh, yes, fine. So we have two brandies, one brandy and soda, and one with ginger ale.

Harry Go to it, Ralphie. (Exit Ralph, incredulous).

Roger So you noticed how I said that anything was o. k. if it wasn't grease?

Harry Yeah, can't say that I blame you, though I do admit that drinking grease really didn't occur to me.

Roger Actually, George telling about his appendix reminded me about my gall bladder operation. The circumstances were somewhat similar.

Alice Really? What happened?

Roger Well, I was in Cleveland on a business trip, and had gotten back from dinner, when I had an attack. It wasn't really as colorful as George's, but something like that in a strange city is not all that pleasant.

Alice Did you have an operation out there?

Roger Fortunately, no. I saw a doctor, and he said that if I came back on the first plane and checked right into the hospital, it would be alright. That's what I did, caught a plane that night, went straight to the hospital, and had surgery the next morning. I guess the basic process would have been the same anywhere, but it was better being here, and made things a lot less complicated for Janet. Besides, I wasn't too broken up leaving Cleveland a day early.

Alice Was the operation pretty easy?

Roger Oh, yeah, nothing to it. But you should have seen the guy who shared my room.

George What was the matter with him?

Roger Well, he was Italian, and he had the same operation a few years ago. Now the results of the operation are no sweat to me, but you know how much olive oil the Italians eat, and greasy food and so forth. So this really worked a hardship on the poor bastard. So anyway, sometimes he just couldn't resist the temptation to partake, and then he'd end up back in the hospital. I don't know if they put him in my room to scare me or what, but it sure removed any temptation I might have had. Actually, I never cared all that much for Italian food anyway; at least, not the way they cook it over here.

Alice You mean you've been to Italy?

Roger Oh, yes, we spent a week there a few years ago.

Harry (Somewhat cynically). A whole week?

Roger (Sincerely, having missed the cynicism). Absolutely, it wouldn't really be worth it any other way. You have to stay a while before you can really get the feel of a country.

Alice What was Italy like? I've never been there.

Roger Very nice, really. The climate is nice and warm, and with air conditioning it doesn't get uncomfortable. Of course, the art museum and historical sites are unsurpassed. Rome, that's where we were, is just fabulous - The Eternal City, they call it, and it's a good name for it. They have everything from Roman ruins to really swinging night clubs. There was one night when Janet was tired and went back to the hotel. I was lucky and got this hot tip from some Italian guy in a bar who steered me to the right place. Talk about a wild show, oh man - even Janet doesn't know the details to that one, and she isn't about to learn either.

(Enter Ralph, bearing drinks).

George Hey, here's Ralph with the booze. Thought you'd never get here.

(Ralph distributes the drinks, starting with Alice. As he does so, the conversation continues around him. When the drinks are passed out, he puts the tray on a table, takes his own glass, and resumes his place. Guests mumble "thanks", or nod, as they are served.)

Harry You ever been to some of the places over the border in Mexico? With a little money, there's not a thing you

can't see - or do, for that matter. I mean not a thing - you name it - anything you've ever imagined, and some things you haven't.

Roger Sure, but that's not Rome. Rome has class, real class.

George I didn't know you'd been to Mexico, Harry.

Harry Well, I didn't really see much of the countryside.

Actually, I went over the border a few times when I was stationed in Texas in the Army. Maybe I didn't travel much there, but I still saw the sights - you know, alluring mountains, exciting canyons, dark, mysterious bush... (Many snickers).

Alice Say, Harry, you were right. This drink isn't half bad.

Harry What did I tell you - you can hardly taste the brandy, right?

Roger So as I was saying, I was in Rome, and then I took a train all the way to Paris. It would have been quicker to fly, of course, but taking a train is another way to really see a country.

Alice Did you get any pictures of your trip?

Roger You bet. I'll have to show you sometime. The slides are really beautiful. I don't think you could find any better in National Geographic.

Alice I'd love to. I really enjoy travel, but the happy wanderer here hasn't taken me any place since our honeymoon.

George Oh, come off it. I took you on my business trip to Pittsburgh just last year; or was it two years ago?

Alice Oh boy, Pittsburgh! (A long, awkward silence ensues).

George (Looks at his watch). Well, Alice, I think it's about time we left.

Alice Don't be silly, we haven't seen the presents yet. Come on, Ralph, open them up.

Ralph Sure. (Takes a box). This is from Harry. (Opens it, takes out a stylish necktie). A tie, and a handsome one, too, Thank you, Harry.

Alice That's what we got, too.

Harry Sorry, Alice. If I had known that, I could have gotten something else.

Alice Don't give it a thought. The way I see it, he can use every decent tie he can get. (Ralph opens the other tie).

Ralph Alice, George, thank you. This really is good looking, isn't it.

George It should be, it's imported. (Ralph opens present from Roger - a colorful silk square).

Ralph Say, isn't this an attractive handkerchief. Thank you, Roger.

Roger Don't mention it; my wife selected it. (Pause. Then, Roger gets up.) Say, Alice, as long as you're leaving now, why don't you come by the house and look at the slides of the trip?

Alice Sounds really nice. O. K. George?

George Fine with me. (Everybody else rises and moves toward the door). By the way, Roger, what kind of camera do you have? (Get to door, and Ralph opens it. Alice exits, followed by Roger.)

Roger (Off Stage) A Leica. Actually, I bought it over there, to save money, you know.

Ralph (As George starts out the door) Thanks so much for coming, and for the tie. It was most considerate of you.

George Sure, sure. (To Roger, as he exits out of hearing) A Leica, did you say? Do you take your own readings or use the electric eye?

Harry (About to leave) Take it easy, Ralphie.

Ralph Won't you stay and have another drink?

Harry No, really...I didn't plan to stay this long anyway.
(Going to door). See you.

(Ralph closes the door. He goes back into the room and tries, feebly and unsuccessfully, to regain his former world. Then he examines his gifts. All this is done slowly, deliberately, as if Ralph was in a daze. He finally proceeds to tie two neckties together, and makes a noose. He folds the silk square into a triangle, and ties it over his face, cowboy-style. He uses the ties to hang himself.)

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